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# INITIATION CEREMONIES OF THE WIRADJURI TRIBES

By R. H. MATHEWS

In 1896 I contributed two articles on Australian class systems,<sup>1</sup> describing the social organization of the native tribes composing the *Wiradjuri* community in New South Wales. They are divided into four groups, called Ippai, Oombi, Murri, and Kubbi, having the marriage laws and rules of descent as set forth in detail in the articles referred to. In other papers I have dealt with the inaugural ceremonies of certain tribes in the northern<sup>2</sup> and southern<sup>3</sup> parts of the *Wiradjuri* territory, but have never before had the opportunity of describing the ceremony as performed in the western portion.

Early in the year 1898 a *Burbung* took place in the parish of Gunnabonna, county of Mossgiel, New South Wales. The native encampment was about half a mile from Blake's waterhole, on Canoble run, about 8 miles east by north from Canoble head-station, or about 33 miles easterly from the town of Ivanhoe. This ceremony, at which two novices were admitted to the privileges of manhood, was attended by the aborigines from Hillston, Keewong, Cobar, Ivanhoe, and Paddington.

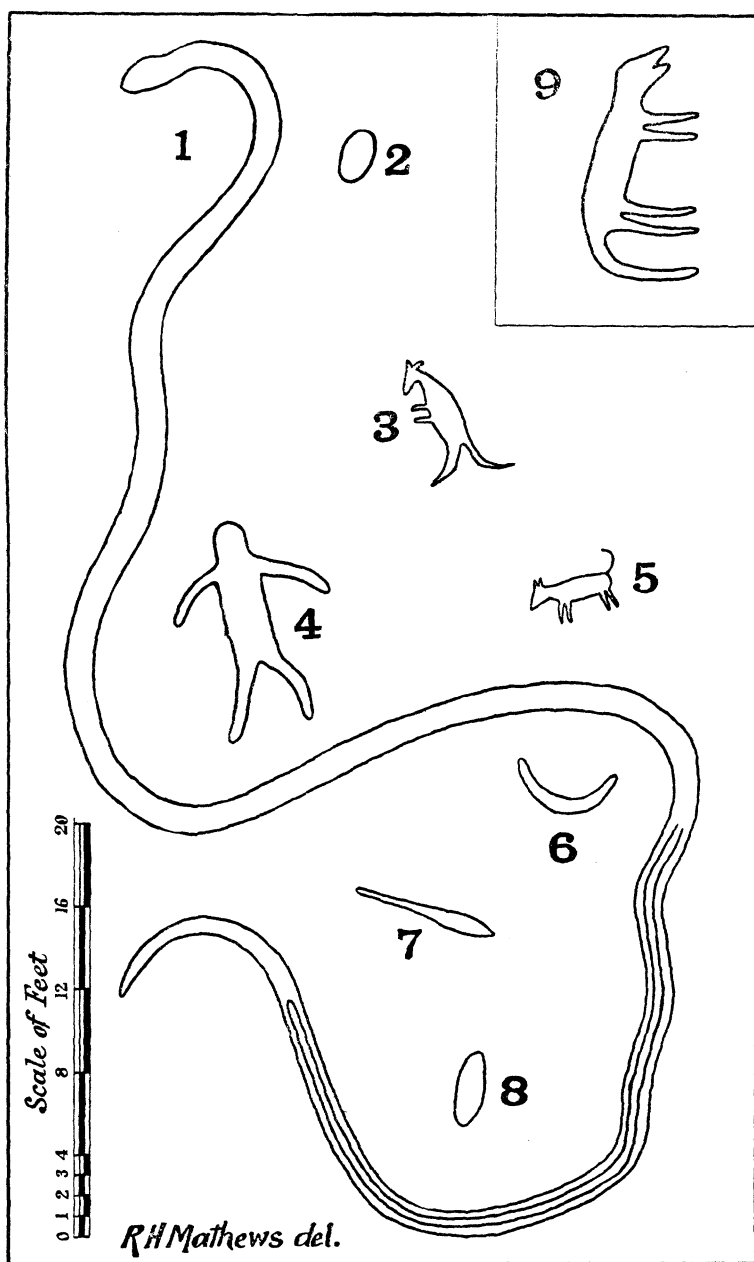
In connection with this gathering the manner of summoning the tribes to attend, the procedure in taking the novices away, the ceremonial performances in the bush, and subsequent ritual were substantially the same as described in my former articles on the *Burbung* of the tribes of Lachlan and Murrumbidgee rivers,

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<sup>1</sup> *American Anthropologist*, IX, 411-416; *Ibid.*, x, 345-347.

<sup>2</sup> *Journ. Anthropol. Inst.*, Lond., xxv, 295-318; *Ibid.*, xxvi, 272-285.

<sup>3</sup> *Journ. Roy. Soc. N. S. Wales*, xxxi, 111-153; *Proc. Roy. Geog. Soc. Aust.*, Q. Bch., xi, 167-169.

FIG. 53—Ground carvings at a *Burbung* ceremony.

hence they need not now be further dealt with. A description of the *Burbung* ground and its surroundings will, however, be of interest for purposes of comparison.

The circular inclosure called the *boorbung* was about 23 paces in diameter, and was formed by heaping the loose surface soil around its circumference, forming an embankment about a foot wide and six inches high, in which a narrow opening was left to afford access to the interior. From this opening a pathway led away northerly through a forest of myall and other trees 560 paces to the *goombo*, consisting of the usual four elongated heaps of earth,<sup>1</sup> not unlike graves; and a few paces farther on was the *gareel*, or fence of boughs. There were no inverted stumps<sup>2</sup> at the *goombo*, as they are not used by the natives of this district.

The following were some of the carvings in the soil: Starting at the *goombo*, and going 5 paces toward the *boorbung* inclosure, was the representation of a serpent-like monster called the *kurrea* (figure 53, 1), outlined in the soil by a groove cut with a sharp-edged wooden instrument. This was by far the longest native carving in the soil that I had ever seen, the distance from the head to the tail, following the sinuosities of the body, being 130 feet, while the width, which was fairly uniform, was from 15 to 18 inches. Within the outline of the posterior portion of this monster were two other incised lines, one on each side, but whether these were intended to represent the intestines, or for the purpose of ornamentation, or to denote a young animal within the larger one, I could not learn.

Not far from the *kurrea*'s head was an oval object representing an emu's egg (figure 53, 2), 2 feet 6 inches in length. Farther on was a kangaroo (3), a little over 6 feet high. In one of the bends of the monster's body, a man upward of 10 feet high was delineated, with an elongated body and short legs (4). There was also the drawing of a dog (5), about 4 feet long, and on the opposite

<sup>1</sup> *Journ. Anthropol. Inst.*, Lond., xxv, 301.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

side of the serpent's body was a large boomerang (6), and a little way farther a nulla-nulla (7). Then there was an elongated depression, nearly 3 feet long, 14 inches wide, and 6 inches deep (8), representing the pudenda of a woman. Small leafy twigs and green grass were suggestively stuck in the loose soil around this depression. The drawings shown in the illustration are in their correct relative positions as they appear on the side of the path.

In several places along the pathway there were cut in the soil representations of the footprints of men, emus, and kangaroos; boomerangs, eggs of birds, and patches of the usual *yowan* patterns. At other places some small sticks, leaves, and rubbish were scraped into circular heaps, about 3 feet in diameter and 2 feet 6 inches high, representing the mallee-hen's nest. There was also an imitation of a wombat's burrow.

About a hundred yards from the great serpent was a drawing apparently representing some imaginary animal of the dog or opossum tribe (9). This was a little over 9 feet long, exclusive of the tail. Only a few trees were marked, because most of the timber growing near the pathway was too small for the purpose. The few markings were not noteworthy. In one of the trees was the imitation of an eagle-hawk's nest.

At the ceremonies connected with the arrivals of strange tribes, and during the daily performances while awaiting their arrival, an image of Dharamoolan was set up in the vicinity of the *goombo*. A sapling was found with two branches growing opposite each other, and these branches were cut off at about the length of a man's arms. The bole of the sapling was then cut through on one side of these "arms," sufficiently long for the head, and on the other side of the branches, or arms, it was again cut through at a distance of about five feet. On this framework, mud mixed with grass was plastered and fastened with string, so as to make a rude figure of a man with only one leg, since according to aboriginal mythology the maleficent being known as Dharamoolan has one leg only. This figure was either propped up with forked sticks or

laid against a tree to support it in an erect position. Two of these images were used at the *Burbung* referred to, but sometimes three or four are made, if the assemblage is a large one. They are carefully hidden away and covered with bushes when not in use, and at the conclusion of the ceremonies they are destroyed in a fire.